

# First Candle: Understanding and Addressing Infant Loss Bereavement is the Focus of the October 2023 Conferences

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As the research, medical, and healthcare professions continue their dedicated work to reduce infant mortality, the reality is that infants do die, and their deaths do leave an emotional mark on the universe of family, friends, and caregivers that surround them.

Understanding and acting on the effects of grief and bereavement are critical and necessary for the health of those affected by infant loss, and in October 2023, two conferences will focus on aspects of this need.

Examining causes of infant death, the latest research, and addressing bereavement will feature in the biennial **International Conference on Stillbirth, SIDS, and SUDI (ISPID)**, to be held in Florence, Italy, 5 – 8 October 2023. This conference is *Baby Survival: Global Achievements and Future Challenges* and is open to professionals, families, students/medical residents, and individuals worldwide. The programs and workshops will cover advances in epidemiology, pathology, physiology, prevention, and bereavement. Topics include sessions on, among others:

- SIDS pathophysiology and SUID and Stillbirth epidemiology
- SUID Bereavement
- SUIDS and SIDS pathology
- Genetics and Metabolomics
- Individual sessions include topics on, among others:
  - Deaths in the neonatal units – A parental perspective on guidelines for professionals.
  - Improving support available for healthcare professionals experiencing professional grief and loss in response to neonatal death within a neonatal intensive care unit in a tertiary maternity hospital.
  - A Genomic Investigation of Sudden Unexpected Postnatal Collapse in Hospitalized Neonates.

Some conference topics are a reminder that those affected by infant loss include healthcare professionals themselves. They become part of the family's fabric during perinatal care and should a perinatal or infant death occur. It does happen that the families will continue to reach out to the neonatology professionals they have come to know as they weather their grief.

In addition, a new training initiative that will be held immediately after the conference is the ISPID Peer Support Program, an international certification program designed to provide individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to support bereaved families. Its first session will occur on 8-9 October in Florence, and conference attendance is not required. ISPID committee members have developed the program in partnership with Harvard Medical School.

Those enrolling in the program will learn about current research in bereavement and peer support and the hands-on and practical skills needed to facilitate groups. Information about the ISPID Conference presentations and workshops and the certification program can be found at <https://ispid2023florence.com/>.

In the United States, First Candle will be hosting an **Infant Loss and Stillbirth Bereavement Conference** on October 21 in Connecticut. The one-day live/remote hybrid conference is directed at parents.

"It's difficult for friends and colleagues to truly understand someone's grief after losing their precious baby," said Alison Jacobson, chief executive of First Candle. "The conference will allow them to meet other families experiencing the same thing they are and learn how to navigate the grief journey and find healing practices."

Sessions will include:

- A three-hour workshop with Kelly Farley, author, speaker, and founder of [Grieving Dads](#). He and his wife have suffered loss through miscarriage and stillbirth, which has led to his ongoing work with bereaved fathers.
- Respecting Your Partner's Grief Style.
- Managing a Sibling's Grief.
- Healing through Art, led by [Asami Green](#).
- A Rainbow Baby, Maybe? Understanding the mixed feelings around having another baby and the possible fear and anxiety.
- The conference will also include a celebration of life to remember all our babies gone too soon.
- Information and registration can be found at [www.firstcandle.org](http://www.firstcandle.org).

**About First Candle:** *First Candle, based in New Canaan, CT, is a 501c (3) non-profit corporation committed to eliminating Sudden Unexpected Infant Death while providing bereavement support for families who have suffered a loss. Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID), which includes SIDS and Accidental Suffocation and Strangulation in Bed (ASSB), remains the leading cause of death for babies one month to one year of age, resulting in 3,500 infant deaths nationwide per year.*

**Disclosures:** *The author is a Certified Doula and the Director of Education and Bereavement Services at First Candle, Inc.*

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